

Man of the World

My Life on Five Continents

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a submarine—the place would be knocked out almost before we got started. There are always spies, in peacetime as well as wartime, and always people out to make a buck, and they would make more than a mere buck if they tipped off the right parties about this project. Many people came to the secretaries of war and of the navy with ideas and suggestions, but Mr. Roosevelt asked the Interior Department to find out which was the highest accessible mountain in the United States at least five hundred miles inland. It turned out to be located something like fifty or sixty miles from Albuquerque or Santa Fe. However, engineers found no area on this mountain where a large space could be blasted out without arousing suspicion. So they decided to give up this particular location and place the lab on a smaller mountain, more like a mesa, a flat face on top of a high promontory. This is where Los Alamos is today.

Back then, however, we faced a tremendous task before the project could get rolling. In addition to the normal construction problems, a spur railroad line had to be built up the steep grade, and every effort had to be made to keep the populace from becoming suspicious. Of course a good many factories and war plants had come into the area, and many people had moved in because of the healthful climate. Still, this further activity might arouse considerable curiosity, and Roosevelt felt something should be done to allay suspicion. He asked for suggestions from various members of his staff, and Marguerite LeHand said, "Why don't you have it leaked to the general public that the government is building a home for pregnant WAAC's, and the secrecy is because they don't want the families or friends of the WAAC's to know they're pregnant?"

This became a standard joke in the army, and people whispered and made all sorts of wisecracks about the home for pregnant WAAC's. And nobody paid any attention to the building of Los Alamos on the high mesa outside Santa Fe.

Now I wish to tell all I can of something that, for many reasons, is difficult to write about. For one thing, some may find it a story hard to believe. For another thing, it involves my family relationships, and also my own judgment and credibility, and so anyone interested in discrediting me will question the story. Nevertheless I intend to tell it.

No small part of my duty as a "public ear" for FDR was to

report to him opinions expressed in Newport and at the Fifth Avenue house by people who were my mother's guests, because these people often represented important forces or areas of influence. Their views in themselves might be far less shrewd than those I heard in hot-dog stands, and as individuals they might be less important than taxi drivers, but what they said carried a certain weight in our economy and I duly reported their opinions even when, as usually happened, they were highly adverse to and critical of the Administration.

One thing I must say for my mother's social circle is that it was completely cosmopolitan. Not long ago, when my *Newsletter* carried a paragraph sympathetic to a Jewish group, I was rebuked by the publisher of a paper of a different sort, a titled Italian, who wrote, "I cannot understand. Your paper carried no advertising and these people were, certainly, not on your late mother's invitation list." To which I hastened to answer: "My mother was a very liberal person. She had no feelings against race, creed, or color. At a dinner once were Ralph Bunche, Bernard Baruch, Senator Taft, and Jimmy Roosevelt."

Socially Mother mixed parties to the extent of having the Farleys to dinner with Harry Fletcher, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee, and she argued pleasantly that we must all work together for a "My Country 'Tis of Thee" party. Actually, she could not give up old friends, and at the same time she had an alert interest in new people, even in new world alignments. For example, she was with me once when I spoke to Andrei Gromyko, and she insisted that I present him. Then she promptly invited him and his wife to dinner, and was disappointed when I said strict Russian protocol would probably forbid their acceptance. It did, but Gromyko himself came to lunch, and Mother talked about his country—her memories, of course, all of royalties deposed and disposed of by the party her guest represented.

Politically Mother had been a loyal Republican for so long that she had forgotten she was born a Southern Democrat. In fact, she might be credited with starting the migration from Dixie into the GOP fold, long before the New Deal. She even opposed sending her granddaughter Cornelia to Vassar because she considered that college too radical.

Now, in the war years, she began to show her age. She aged beautifully, dressing for a family dinner as carefully as for a

formal public appearance, with her Swedish maid Ingrid Nyström spending hours on her coiffure, and her own hand applying the simple make-up Worth sent her from Paris. But as many older people do, she began to feel a sometimes touching gratitude to old friends, or to new ones who knew how to make the proper approach. And she was less critical of the "climbers," a quality spiritually admirable but one which made her more vulnerable to their designs.

Some of the people around her in these days I came to distrust. In themselves, these people were quite unimportant, but they talked and I listened. And from 1940 on, some of the things they said concerned me very much. The 1940 election, breaking the third-term precedent, confirmed FDR as the people's choice to carry on through the war years. His opponent was Mr. Dewey, and the campaign slogan "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream" was twisted, you may remember, to "Don't change to a Shetland pony." The voters didn't, but many people were not pleased, especially those traditionalists who were outraged by the overthrow of the third-term precedent which they had counted on to rid them of "That Man."

The economic royalists were of course frustrated, for now, with a world at war, the chances for financial and industrial gains were immeasurable if only the Administration would go along. Instead, we had this New Dealer—this Socialist—this Red—the epithets piled up, and those who had begun by criticizing FDR's brain trust ended by talking of a madman in the White House, from whom the country must at all costs be saved. Now they were ready to talk revolution—revolution in the Spanish manner, with the rebels on the right. They felt that the third term began a dictatorship, even a dynasty, against which all true patriots should fight.

Certain people all over the country talked like this, in fact, and there were all sorts of stories about the seriousness of Roosevelt's illness—mental, of course!—and the possible succession of the sons, and so on. Such talk could be brushed off as long as it was confined to the cranks who, as they made their wild guesses and dire predictions, shifted their tobacco plugs and spat at the stove, or rattled the car gears in traffic. However, you heard the same things around dinner tables in Newport and New York and Washington, from people who had power and influence. They were just as gullible and excitable, just as willing to believe the

most fantastic rumors against the man they hated—and some of them had power to act. Also, some of them had allies.

And as war loomed closer, army men thought of their careers and not all of them were completely loyal to their Commander in Chief. The Navy remembered him as one of their own, but the Army had no such tie, and men who had been passed over for promotion or who found the New Deal agencies a hindrance in negotiating military contracts had bones to pick. Indeed, the army contracts made natural allies of certain officers and of the hate-Roosevelt group of industrialists.

On the fringes of this group were the anti-New Dealers whose prejudices were already roused, certain wealthy and influential Southerners, certain Catholic admirers of Franco, certain sections of the press, including the still-powerful Hearst papers with their scandal columns. These people were no less intense in their anti-Roosevelt feeling, and they could be depended on to spread or originate rumors and fan the flames of hate, although they lacked the power and unity of the hard core of financial and industrial opposition.

In addition to these fellow travelers in the anti-Roosevelt movement, there were also a few who acted as liaison with the hard core of opposition that really meant business. And some of them, I was sorry to discover, were to be met at my mother's house—wealthy industrialists, internationalists of the royalist persuasion, and a number who had suffered disappointment in their private ambitions. Their talk told me of others who were like-minded.

For years my father had been too ill to see his old friends, and so he never knew that relatives of a wealthy Midwesterner, whom Mother never liked but who was kind to me in my childhood, were involved in what I now had to consider a real conspiracy. Finally, from one of my oldest friends and colleagues in Washington, to whom I was indebted for past favors, I got confirmation of what I had learned in Newport and New York.

I use the word *conspiracy*; I really am talking of a plot—a serious, long-discussed plan to—shall I say—*capture* the President. The idea was not to kill him; none of these people was as crazy as John Wilkes Booth. Nor was it to kidnap him for negotiation, as had happened in the case of Chiang Kai-shek. Rather, proceeding in the pattern of certain South American revolutions engineered by the palace guard, the idea was to impose a firm restraint, for the good of the country; to hold this dictator, this

madman—well cared for, of course; well treated, but well guarded—while sane persons set up emergency controls and saved America.

Given the premises, the idea was logical, and they were premises which many people accepted as truths. Because I had trained myself to listen, and because my name predisposed those who did not know me to assume that I had prejudices akin to theirs, I heard here and there, and bit by bit, pieces that fitted together. I tried not to believe what I had to conclude, and I carried on investigations of my own long before I mentioned the matter to my superiors. But in time I did report because I wanted certain people investigated by the proper federal agencies. In these investigations great care was taken to sort people out and not confuse the innocent with the guilty; there was no "guilt by association," and that is one reason why I am being very careful to offer no clues which might involve the innocent.

As a matter of fact, FBI investigations to protect FDR had been carried on long before this. One such had resulted in changing the plan to hold a conference between Roosevelt and Churchill on the Stettinius estate at Palm Beach, for it was discovered that reports about the conference arrangements were going from Palm Beach to San Francisco, and from there to Germany by way of Mexico and Madrid. The Palm Beach information was supplied by a woman of wealth and social position whom I had first seen in the Hitler circles in Berlin, and the information-gathering involved her small son, who moved freely about the Stettinius estate. As a result of this leak, the conference was eventually held at sea. The people involved were not arrested; they served as links for further investigation.

One of my oldest army friends talked to me freely, when he had a few drinks, of jealousies involving the top brass. As everyone knows, there was a MacArthur party, as opposed to Bradley and Eisenhower; what was not generally known was that the contest for power at lower levels was no less bitter and much more reckless, and as in the Conway Cabal of Washington's day, the threat was against the Commander in Chief.

So what happened? Well, as you know, the President never was captured by the enemy. Neither was any conspiracy exposed, with public scandals and punishments. When the facts were known, I was permitted to call my friend, and another army man I knew well, and offer a tip that all the plans were known. Those involved in the cabal were not disgraced or downgraded, but they weren't

promoted either. Two of them, I think, are dead; at least they have disappeared from the pages of *Who's Who in America*. Of the industrialists and the social leaders who conspired or went along, some have died, some have lost power and influence. Others live in Monaco. We can afford to forget them all.

But at the time the whole affair had a tremendous effect on me; I lived at high tension for months. I remembered once asking Goebbels, "And how would you destroy the United States?" And his reply: "*From within.*"

As I have indicated, some of these conspirators I had known from childhood; they had dined with us, given me toys, been on a first-name basis with my family. And although, a decade before, I had broken politically with my parents and was quite accustomed to our differences and to maintaining my own independence of thought, never before had my devotion to FDR made me—so to speak—a spy among my own friends and in the family household.

One problem was whether to tell FDR. It was no time to add to his worries. At length, torn by this question, I talked to Mrs. Roosevelt about it—this was late in the day, months after the investigations began. She promised to tell FDR at Hyde Park, and she did, only to discover, as she told me later, that he had known all along.

All the tension finally proved a little too much for me. One day, doing a routine inspection on my army job, I felt a pain in my chest and had to sit down. I tried to keep quiet about it, but an army doctor had a look at me, called it a coronary attack, and ordered me into the hospital. At first I was furious, and saw it only as part of the bigger plot—to get me out of the way.

In time, the doctors gave me the welcome news that my heart wasn't permanently affected. But they warned me about worry and excitement, and I think my medical retirement may have saved my life.